

Testimony of
Tim L. Gothard, Executive Director, Alabama Wildlife Federation
Before the
U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Agriculture
Regarding the Forest Land Enhancement Program (FLEP)
July 20, 2004

Mr. Chairman, distinguished members of the Committee, it is my privilege to speak to you today on behalf of the Alabama Wildlife Federation and our 18,000 members regarding the importance of the Forest Land Enhancement Program.

Established in 1935, the Alabama Wildlife Federation is a 501c3, non-profit organization devoted to the wise-use and responsible stewardship of our wildlife, forests, fish, water, soils, and air. Our mission fully engages and promotes the active management of our forest and wildlife resources as a source of both economic and social prosperity.

In Alabama, as in most of the southeastern United States, the land base is predominately owned by non-industrial, private landowners – individuals and families. So being, the Alabama Wildlife Federation places great importance on education and planning assistance for private landowners to help them manage their forest and farm lands for timber production, game and non-game wildlife habitat, water quality, and outdoor recreational opportunities. Specific examples include our 600 page hard-back book called “Managing Wildlife” which we completed in 1999. This book was specifically prepared and dedicated to the owners and managers of private lands in the southeast. Over 10,000 copies of this book are currently in circulation, most

of which are in the hands of private landowners who are using it to help guide management on their lands. We are also heavily involved in providing on-the-ground planning assistance to private landowners through a program called the “Land Stewardship Assistance Program.” Since its inception in 2000, on-site technical assistance has been provided to over 700 landowners and 400,000 acres in Alabama. I share these examples with you to point out that our organization recognizes the importance of private landowners in Alabama as “the tool” to insure that we have abundant and productive forests and wildlife lands, both now and in the future.

The Forest Land Enhancement Program represents an important mechanism and opportunity to maximize efforts to engage and stimulate private landowners to manage their lands wisely. This is an important part of the mission of state forestry organizations, organizations such as ours, and many others organizations that recognize the long-term importance of land management to healthy forests, healthy wildlife populations, and a healthy economy. Unfortunately, the breadth of this mission exceeds our combined capacities. As a result, the diverse group in Alabama that was asked by our state forestry agency to assist with strategic planning for the FLEP, placed great importance on using FLEP to facilitate public-private partnerships that would maximize information and education transfer to private landowners and stimulate on-the-ground conservation in a highly cost-effective manner. In short – we want to use FLEP to empower private landowners to achieve their land management needs and goals.

To give a specific example, the Alabama Wildlife Federation formed the “Alabama Quail Trail” about two years ago as a tool to focus the interest and resources in quail improvement. We do this by focusing on three fundamental aspects: Quail Hunting, Quail Research, and Quail Conservation. In support of this effort, and with funding assistance provided through the FLEP

program, the Alabama Wildlife Federation, our State Forestry Agency, the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service, Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, and Auburn University are finalizing plans for a series of Quail Management Seminars across the state. The seminars will focus on providing natural resource professionals, land managers, and private landowners with up-to-date information on how they can manage their forest and farm lands to improve habitat for wild quail and other species that require early successional habitats. In conjunction with this project, the team will also develop a landowners guide to quail habitat management that will further increase our abilities to reach private landowners and effect sound management on the abundant private lands in our state. Without FLEP, this project would not be on the table.

The Forest Land Enhancement Program is an important tool to help us achieve cost-effective conservation achievements on private lands. In Alabama, this will be achieved by increasing public-private partnerships and focusing directly on empowering private landowners. We encourage you to look favorably upon funding this important program.